



Testimony of Natalie Jordan, Senior Vice President, Cultural Care Au Pair
Committee on Labor and Public Employees Hartford, CT

March 8, 2016

CT RB No. 393: AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC WORKERS

Good Afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, Senator Hwang, Representative Rutigliano and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Natalie Jordan and I am the Senior Vice President of Cultural Care Au Pair, a designated program sponsor supporting over 500 hosting families throughout the state of Connecticut.

Cultural Care Au Pair is one of 15 organizations in the U.S., committed to cultural exchange and offering the au pair program in the State of Connecticut for over 25 years. As a designated program sponsor, we are responsible for the enforcement of the U.S. Department of State regulations which are intended to ensure the safety and well-being of the exchange visitors participating on this J-1 visa cultural exchange program. As the largest of the designated sponsors nationwide, we feel it is vitally important to share our concerns regarding CT RB No. 393: AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC WORKERS to preserve this highly acclaimed cultural and educational exchange program.

The participants of the J-1 visa au pair program are exchange visitors and should not be considered domestic workers. The au pairs on this program travel to the United States for a one year term and live with an American host family while attending classes and providing childcare support in the host family home. CT RB No. 393 would unnecessarily apply to au pairs and while creating protections for domestic workers, would weaken the protections already in place for J-1 visa au pairs.

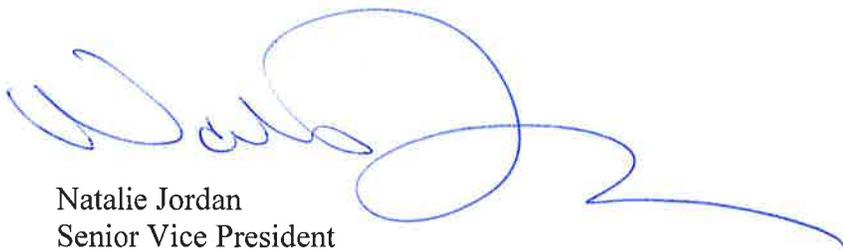
The federal regulations (22 C.F.R. 62.31) which govern the au pair program contain provisions for every element of the program from participant screening and program sponsor support requirements to permissible activities, housing, working hours, rest periods, insurance, payment and requirements for completing a required educational component. These regulations ensure that au pairs are protected during their program term so that this program can achieve its important foreign diplomacy goals. These regulations provide a detailed mechanism for oversight of both the au pair and the host family. Au pairs have more extensive protections than any domestic worker even after implementation of the proposed Connecticut domestic workers legislation. Cultural Care has placed over 100,000 au pairs in the homes of American host families over 25 years. This would simply not have been possible without the kind of structure and support that the federal regulations provide. The U.S. Department of State continues to evaluate the regulations and revises them in an ongoing effort to make sure that the au pairs choosing to spend their year in the U.S. are protected, safe and have the opportunity for a positive cultural exchange experience.

We recognize and applaud the efforts being made by the Connecticut domestic workers legislation to provide protections to those workers who have otherwise been left vulnerable. However, au pair participants have been under the protection of extensive federal regulations since the program's inception nearly 30 years ago. Additionally, the au pair regulations address the issues in the Connecticut domestic workers legislation and include even more protections. In fact, there are elements of this bill which are expressly prohibited in the au pair program regulations including potential charges for board and lodging, reference to unpaid sick time or vacation time, a provision for working 7 days per week, and accrued leave time that falls far below the regulatory requirements of this federal cultural exchange program. To include the J-1 au pair program participants in the application of this bill would confuse participants and lead to potential vulnerabilities. We, therefore, respectfully request that J-1 visa au pairs in the state of Connecticut should be exempted from the legislation proposed for domestic workers.

Cultural Care Au Pair is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts where recent legislation has been passed called the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. It is apparent that the bill was not intended to apply to J-1 visa au pairs, and in an effort to provide additional clarity, an amendment to the bill has been introduced which will provide an official exemption. We continue to receive support from members of Congress and recognition that this federal J-1 visa au pair program does not require the protections outlined in the bill and that the regulatory scheme already in place provides even greater protections.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for an exemption from CT RB No. 393 and recognition that this J-1 visa program already provides extensive protections through the federal regulations. By doing so, this well founded, unique cultural exchange program will continue to be able to provide young men and women as well as American host families with some of the most gratifying and rewarding experiences.

Please let me know if need further information. Thank you for your consideration.



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cc: Linda Aloe Sobin